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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: OSD DASD FATA VISIT TO SARAJEVO

REF: 06 SARAJEVO 2908

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Your visit comes after two years of nearly uninterrupted progress in the defense sphere in Bosnia. Bosnia has successfully created a unified, single Armed Forces and maintains a robust and continuously straightening security relationship with the United States. Leaders and the public alike widely hailed the decision to invite Bosnia to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP), and view it as affirmation that Bosnia's future lies within the Euro-Atlantic community. But despite the unmistakable signs that Bosnia is moving forward, it is clear that much of this progress has shaky foundations. Comprehensive defense reform remains a work in progress, with some of its key elements long-delayed. On many bilateral security issues, we are coming up against an increasingly polarized political environment that makes some of our initiatives, such as support for coalition operations in Iraq, a tough sell. Finally, there remains a general lack of understanding of what PfP membership and NATO integration means in real terms.

Your meetings with the senior Bosnian leadership present a good opportunity to push our bilateral security agenda; assess the progress of defense reform; and deliver a strong message in support of Bosnia's continued Euro-Atlantic integration. End summary.

DEFENSE REFORM: STILL WORK TO BE DONE

¶2. (C) Defense reform is indisputably one of the biggest success stories in Bosnia since Dayton. In a two year period, Bosnia adopted a Law on Defense, abolished the two entity-level Ministries of Defense and created a single state institution in their place. Consulting with NATO HQ, the Ministry of Defense decided on a force structure for the new, joint Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the Presidency approved in July 2006. The new units created under the decision have been established, and should be fully-staffed by mid-summer. A clear and direct command and control structure has been developed and adopted. The new

Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces have worked well together, and undertaken successful joint planning activities such as the deployment of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit to Iraq. The new state-level institutions met the conditions for PfP membership, and the decision to invite Bosnia into the organization was partially seen as validation of the progress to date. We have devoted substantial resources and prestige into this process, and can be objectively pleased with the results we have seen to date.

¶3. (C) There also indisputably exists, however, substantial ground to be covered in the implementation of vital elements of defense reform. By most accounts, since the Presidency decision on the force structure in July, reform implementation has slowed. Long-awaited personnel decisions for the staffing of both the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces were continuously delayed until January. On the military side, this delayed the retirement of 2000 members of the service who did not fit into the new force structure. (Note: Outside analysts consider that it will take at least a decade to stand-up a truly integrated, multi-ethnic force. End Note.) Many civilian offices in the ministry remain under-staffed. There has also been a continued failure to resolve outstanding property issues between the state-level Ministry of Defense and the entities, with most defense articles and property remaining in the possession of the entity governments. Another cause for concern is the recently proposed defense budget cuts at this crucial juncture in the reform process, just as Bosnia is joining PfP. During your meetings with the senior Bosnian leadership, you will want to underscore the absolute necessity to see defense reforms through to their conclusion, and adequately fund the Armed Forces to a level to allow them to be active PfP participants.

¶4. (C) There is also a short-term leadership vacuum at the Ministry of Defense that may temporarily slow the pace of reform. Former Defense Minister Nikola Radovanovic left office last week, and his successor, former Federation general Selmo Cikotic will not assume duty until late April (Note. The Bosnian Law on Defense requires that the minister be at least three years removed from military service. Cikotic retired from the Armed Forces in April 2004. End note.) To fill the gap, Deputy Minister Maria Pendes is serving as Acting Minister. Radovanovic was a capable minister, whose apolitical, technocratic leadership well served the reform agenda in its early implementation stages. By all accounts, Cikotic is of the same mold, and we hope that he can exercise decisive leadership to move our joint goals forward in the coming years.

BILATERAL AGENDA WRAPPED IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

¶5. (C) Our bilateral security relationship with Bosnia is strong and strengthening. Without U.S. material and technical assistance provided to the government, defense reform would not have been possible. We have targeted our security assistance to supporting the Bosnian Armed Forces' efforts to create a NATO-compatible force capable of deploying on overseas missions. To that end, we have supported the creation and training of the EOD unit, which has deployed four platoon rotations to Iraq since 2005. The Presidency recently extended the mission's mandate until the end of 2007. Parliament is expected to confirm the decision at the end of February. The Presidency also recently approved an arms and ammunition donation to Afghanistan at our initiative. We concluded a Status of Forces Agreement with Bosnia in 2006. The senior defense leadership, and most political leaders as well, have expressed a strong desire to expand our joint security relationship.

¶6. (C) We do foresee, however, some problems ahead. Bosnian politics, particularly on the Bosniak side, have drifted in an increasingly rightward and nationalist direction. We have already seen the effects of this on some items in our bilateral agenda, and we anticipate further challenges in the

future. Newly elected Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic has made his opposition to expanding coalition support activities known, and he is often the roadblock within the Bosnian Presidency when it comes to receiving support for our security agenda (see reftel). Silajdzic's foil on the Presidency for these issues has unexpectedly been Bosnian-Serb President Nebojsa Radmanovic, who pushed the EOD extension and Afghan arms donation through the Presidency. In your discussions at the Presidency you will probably see this dynamic at work, and you should take the opportunity to stress to Silajdzic the importance of our strategic relationship and the need for Bosnia to be an active participant in coalition support operations.

U.S. DRAWDOWN, EAGLE BASE CLOSURE

¶ 17. (C) The decision to remove the last U.S. troops from Bosnia was not popular here, especially among Bosniaks. For many Bosnians, the U.S. military and political presence in Bosnia is viewed as the glue that holds the country together. Despite the fact that the U.S. maintained only a few hundred troops (with very limited capabilities) in country in the past couple of years, a majority of Bosnians considered their withdrawal to have an adverse effect on the security situation. Though the PfP invitation has gone a long way to fill the resulting security void, substantial anxiety remains following the drawdown.

¶ 18. (C) In this context, we think it is important to appropriately handle the closure and transfer of Eagle Base in Tuzla. Former President Tihic approached us in the Fall and informed us that Tuzla municipal and Canton authorities planned to turn the airstrip at Eagle Base into a civilian airport. Tihic requested that equipment necessary for the airport's maintenance be donated to Bosnian authorities. EUROC and USAFE have worked hard to meet this request, and we are prepared to donate or sell most of the items requested. The current plan is turn the entire facility over to the Bosnians on June 30. We hope to organize an appropriate and high-level transfer ceremony that highlights the major success of the 11-year U.S military mission and Bosnia's capacity to now provide its own security.

NATO- STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST LINK

¶ 19. (C) Full NATO membership enjoys strong public and elite support across ethnic lines. While European Union accession is perhaps a decade or more away, Bosnians view membership in the premier collective security organization to be within reach and absolutely necessary for their country's long-term peace and prosperity. The PfP invitation was widely hailed here as the first tangible proof that Bosnia's future lies in Euro-Atlantic institutions, and a signal that real progress has been realized in the past decade. The Bosnian political and military leadership have announced their intentions to put Bosnia on the fast-track for full membership, and some top officials have even publicly asserted that membership is a possibility by 2009.

¶ 10. (C) This over-optimistic prognosis is indicative of the fundamental inability for the elite and public alike to grasp what NATO means and requires in real terms and presents us with the delicate task of keeping the Bosnians motivated, while simultaneously injecting a dose of realism into the discussions. In the two months since Bosnia acceded to PfP, there has been little political and public discussion about what the path forward entails, particularly the necessity of reform across the board, including in civilian institutions. Bosnia is inarguably in a better position than other PfP invitees in that the NATO-directed defense reform process established a military and Defense Ministry that should eventually be capable of NATO membership. But most Bosnian leaders do not seem to understand that NATO requires a host of commitments from the entire state, not just the Ministry of Defense. In your discussions with the Bosnian leadership, you will want to directly address how, as Assistant NATO

Secretary-General John Colston recently put it in his visit

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to Sarajevo, "militaries do not join NATO, entire states join NATO." At the same time you will not want to sound a too pessimistic note about timetables that will discourage the genuinely committed leadership from the task ahead.

¶11. (SBU) Your meetings with the senior government officials and parliamentarians are an opportunity to interject a fresh voice in support of our policy goals. We look forward to welcoming you to Sarajevo.

MCELHANEY